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NEWS

Metaverse clothing, travel, plastic surgery: Experts predict life in 2030

By John Mac Ghlonn and Brad Hamilton

January 8, 2022 | 8:08am | Updated



In the metaverse you'll be able to swim with the sharks, tour the Parthenon in Athens, or go skydiving — all from your VR glasses. And "you" can be anyone you want, even LeBron James or a jaguar.

NY Post photo composite

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Imagine scaling Everest, swimming with hammerheads or skydiving over the Grand Canyon — without ever leaving your living room. All will supposedly be possible in the metaverse, a new level of virtual reality being developed by the world's top tech gurus.

"I want to walk through the grounds of Trinity College, Dublin, to turn the pages of the Book of Kells, and I'll be able to do that in VR," said British futurist [Andrew Curry](#), referring to the 800-year-old gospel scrolls housed at Ireland's top university.

In its fully realized form, the metaverse promises to offer true-to-life sights, sounds and even smells, where a tour of ancient Greece or a visit to a Seoul café can happen from your home, Curry said. Decked out with full-spectrum VR headsets, [smart clothing](#) and [tactile-responsive haptic gloves](#), the at-home traveler can touch the Parthenon in Athens or taste the rich foam of a Korean dalgona coffee.

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jaguar or take the court at Madison Square Garden as LeBron James. The only limits are your imagination.



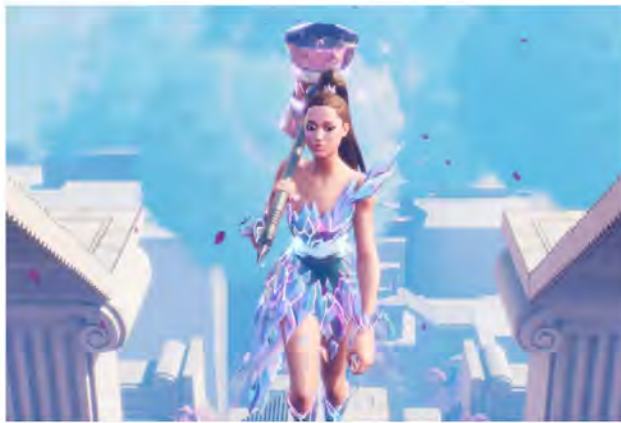
The only limit in virtual reality is your imagination.
Getty Images/iStockphoto

By 2030, "a large proportion of people will be in the metaverse in some way," predicts [Melanie Subin](#), a director at [The Future Today Institute](#) in New York City.

Some will simply use it "only to fulfill work or educational obligations," she said. Others "will live the majority of their waking hours 'jacked in.'"

Using a "blend of physical and behavioral biometrics, emotion recognition, sentiment analysis, and personal data," the metaverse will be able to create a customized and enhanced reality for each person, she said.

In the future, "AR wearables may be as pervasive as smart phones are today," said Patrick Cozzi, who runs the 3D tech company [Cesium](#) and is heavily involved in enhancing the metaverse.



Ariana Grande kicked off her "Rift" tour with a virtual performance on the free-to-play game "Fortnite."

He and others see a future where headsets like the Oculus — a popular holiday gift this season that invites you to "defy reality" — replace the cell phone altogether, used 24/7 as a go-to device for people to hang out with friends, shop or travel through the virtual stratosphere.

But the current version of the metaverse, for now, is somewhat less grand.

Several companies, including Snap, Amazon, Microsoft and Mark Zuckerberg's company Meta (formerly Facebook), have their own competing versions of this new digital world. (Meta says it will dedicate \$10 billion to the effort, and it plans to hire 10,000 workers just for their European operation.) But while the VR spaces they've developed — mostly for socializing and gaming — are colorful and cool, none has created an all-encompassing experience that blurs what is real and imaginary.



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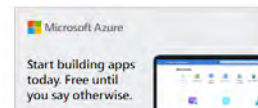
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In September, Seoul became the first major city to announce plans to go full meta, recreating its ecosystem on a virtual platform.

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Nor are the apps, games and platforms of the metaverse interconnected. There's no central meeting ground. Millions of people spend hours a day in their favorite virtual worlds, shooting down zombies in the video game "Fortnite," for example, or aliens in "Half Life: Alyx," but they can't jump from one to the other without logging out and switching platforms.

Still, some aspects of the future metaverse are already coming to life.

Recording artists have embraced VR via "Fortnite," a streaming- and cosplay-friendly game where avatars gather en masse on a magical island.

Ariana Grande kicked off her "Rift" tour Aug. 6 with a virtual performance on the free-to-play game, her anime alter ego decked out in a dress of broken glass fragments as she wielded a giant crystal hammer. The songs were prerecorded but fans could follow the virtual Grande as she sang and danced, swishing her trademark ponytail.



After challenging her climbing skills in virtual reality, Catherine Allen (above) felt more confident pushing herself in real life in Madeira.

You could even buy and wear her "skin" — the star's animated look — for your own avatar. She reportedly split the proceeds from in-game purchases to the event with creator Epic Games and pocketed a cool \$20 million. Since its release in 2017, the game itself has generated more than \$10 billion in revenue.

'It takes away the risk of certain activities and you can push yourself out of your comfort zone.'

- Catherine Allen, on testing herself with virtual reality climbs before tackling the real thing

In September, Seoul became the first major city to announce plans to go full meta, saying it was set to create a fully realized virtual "ecosystem for all areas of its municipal administration, such as economic, cultural, tourism, educational and civic service," according to the Seoul Metropolitan Government.

The agency said its most popular tourist attractions would be recreated in the virtual space on a platform it plans to launch, starting in 2023.

While the metaverse industry is growing fast, fueled by the pandemic keeping people at home, it's an open question as to whether one company will eventually emerge as the dominant force, such as Google, which now has a near monopoly among search engines.



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Ralph Lauren is hawking beanies and down jackets for the grade-school set on Roblox.

"We would like it to be a unified system," said Yesha Sivan, an author, professor and expert on the metaverse who edits the [Journal of Virtual Worlds Research](#). "The key factor is having global standards that would facilitate this."

"We hope to be able to buy a virtual shirt in world A and take the shirt to world B," he explained.

Because the metaverse frequently involves physical activity — whether you're chasing aliens or taking a yoga class — it also provides real-world benefits, said Catherine Allen, who runs the company [Limina Immersive](#).

"It takes away the risk of certain activities and you can push yourself out of your comfort zone," she said.



The VR-only MetaBirkin bag, a digital version of the Hermès fave, can sell for tens of thousands of dollars.

"I did a VR experience called The Climb during the lockdown, and it gave me a sense of body confidence," said Allen, an avid hiker. "Then I did a real hike in Madeira, and I found I was much more adventurous. This sort of thing can be quite deep on an almost spiritual level."

Digital fashion is also hot, as luxury brands scramble to meet the demand for jazzing up avatars by creating virtual dresses you'll never actually wear and shoes you can't put on your real-life feet. And no demographic is being ignored.

Ralph Lauren is hawking beanies and down jackets for the grade-school set on Roblox, the cartoon-like game with 150 million participants and a \$38 billion valuation.

Gucci, Balenciaga and Dior have rolled out lines for Gen Z gamers, including high-end designer wear, handbags and accessories. On Dec. 13, Nike bought a digital sneaker company, RTFKT, which has sold 600 pairs of shoes, generating \$3 million — all without having to manufacture a single pair.



Nike bought a digital sneaker company, RTFKT, which has sold 600 pairs of shoes.

Even Hermès, the company responsible for the [ridiculously expensive](#) Birkin bag, has entered the metaverse. On Dec. 17, [the company unveiled the MetaBirkin](#) — a VR version of its signature bag, created by LA artist Mason Rothschild, and "made" just 100 of them. With such a limited supply, prices have "skyrocketed to near real-Birkin levels — with some selling for as much as the crypto equivalent of £40,000 [British pounds]," Elle reported.

Real estate agencies are going as far as acquiring — and selling — virtual land.

[Decentraland](#), an online environment where users can exchange cryptocurrencies for 90,000 parcels of land, has exploded in popularity of late. In November, Tokens.com [plunked down \\$2.4 million](#) for a 116-parcel estate in the heart of Decentraland's Fashion Street district, where the company plans to develop a virtual Fifth Avenue. "Rather than try to create a universe like Facebook, I said, 'Why don't we go in and buy the parcels of land in these metaverses, and then we can become the landlords?'" Andrew Kiguel, the

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Buying parcels of land in virtual environment Decentraland (above) is becoming increasingly popular.

Doctors are also taking full advantage of the emerging technology

Surgical residents at UConn Health are donning Oculus headsets and practicing procedures via VR, placing pins in virtual broken bones and learning from mistakes before they actually perform any operations.

In June, Johns Hopkins neurosurgeons relied on VR during a spinal fusion operation while wearing Augmedics headsets, which have a "see-through eye display that projects images of a patient's internal anatomy, such as bones and other tissue, based on CT scans," [CNBC reported](#).

"It's like having a GPS navigator in front of your eyes," said Dr. Timothy Witham, director of the Johns Hopkins Neurosurgery Spinal Fusion Laboratory.



Veterans are already using VR to help them overcome the symptoms of PTSD.

Getty Images

Holographic images and VR technology are already helping train first responders in how to treat victims of heart attacks. Military vets are learning to treat their own PTSD by putting on a headset and, with a therapist at their side, going back and revisiting the moment they were injured or traumatized on the battlefield.

Plastic surgery will also be less of a guessing game, Subin said.

"Rather than asking the patient to try to envision what the changes will look like, doctors will use digital twin technology, synthetic media, haptics and robotics to not only illustrate the changes to the patient but also allow the patient to touch the changes. 'How does your new nose feel?'"

One of the biggest challenges for companies creating the metaverse is figuring out how to engage all five senses.



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Spending too much time in the metaverse, or going in and out of VR, can be disorienting and could pose a health threat. Shutterstock

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"The current VR/AR devices mainly support visual, audio and haptic feedback," said [Hyo Kang](#), a professor of digital arts and sciences at the University of Florida. "And there are a limited number of devices/tools that support simulating smells and tastes."

The metaverse faces some real-world challenges, too.

On Nov. 26, a female beta tester working for Mark Zuckerberg's Meta reported that she'd been groped by another user in the company's Horizon World VR platform. "Not only was I groped last night, but there were other people there who supported this behavior, which made me feel isolated in the Plaza," the woman [posted on The Verge](#).

Vipp Jaswal, CEO of the Interpersonal Intelligence Advisory, said harassment is likely to become a growing problem because "there's no police force in the metaverse — it's totally unregulated. We're going to have to have systems and controls in place."

Another potential problem is the wear and tear on users who spend countless hours roaming the metaverse.

Whirling around your house while wearing a headset poses an actual threat, she said, because you can crash into walls or furniture. "A man in Russia died by being impaled by a glass coffee table," said Allen of Limina Immersive.



Although movies like "The Matrix" seem far-fetched, it could be our reality in 50 years time. Warner Bros

She said going in and out of VR also can be disorienting, something she's experienced herself once after tossing off a headset. "I looked at my hands and they weren't my hands. It was very strange and it took me a few hours to come back to myself."

Most people involved in the metaverse are optimistic about what's coming next — and hope for a rapid development of its technology. But they also recognize that not every promising application is right around the corner.

"In building the metaverse, we may be facing the most exciting and difficult technical challenge in history," Cozzi of Cesium said.

"In some ways, the metaverse is already here, but some achievements are on a 10-year horizon, and other advancements may be 50 years away."

Subin agrees.

"If you're asking when we'll all be running around like Neo in the Matrix," she said, "I think we're looking a bit further out than 2030."

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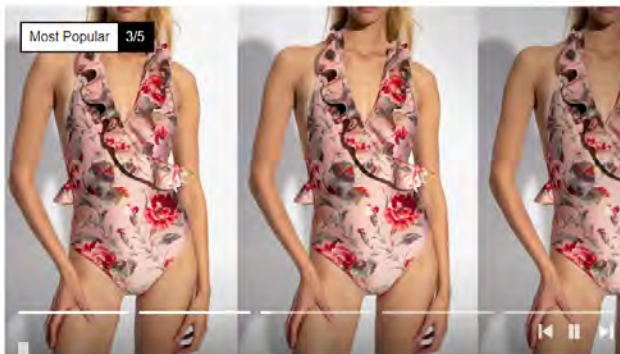
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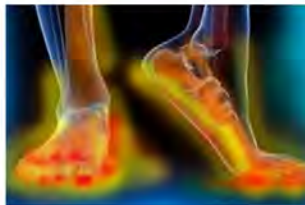
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